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## American Jewish Demographics: Decline and Response



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Jewish Life Network is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewry to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

Photographs in this issue appear courtesy of Art Today.com, Photos.com, and Ilene Vogelstein.

## American Jewish Demographics: Decline and Response

Many experts have argued recently that Jewish population statistics reveal a community in the midst of stagnation or decline. Although studies vary depending on methodology and definitions of Jewishness, the soon-to-be released National Jewish Population Survey lends support to the view that our population has been shrinking since 1990. This would be the first population decline in American Jewish history. If we are to equate demographic strength with spiritual and cultural vibrancy, the American Jewish community is facing daunting challenges to its oft-stated goals of renaissance.

There are those who affirm that the Jewish community is becoming “leaner and meaner” – smaller in number but more vigorous in intensity, as is indicated by the increasing numbers of day schools and Jewish studies programs on campus. However, by other criteria – for instance, the levels of Jewish philanthropic giving – Jews no longer seem to perceive their identity through a chiefly Jewish lens. In this issue of CONTACT, we examine the question of decline as well as the myriad ways of assessing the nature and vitality of the Jewish community. We also begin to explore programs that might increase not only our numbers, but the strength and intensity of American Jewish life.

Some would argue that the decline in the American Jewish population indicates the failure of programs created in the last ten years to shore up Jewish identity. Others assert that Jews, having entered the American mainstream, have adjusted their birthrates to levels typical of other middle- to upper-class communities. Gone are the days when women were expected to stay home and raise many children. Indeed, among an increasing number of young, non-Orthodox Jews, fertility rates are not seen as any kind of barometer of one’s Jewish commitment or identity. As we strive for ways to revitalize American Jewry, we should keep in mind that for much of the community, the content of our religion and culture is more important than the quantity of our population.

Finally, there is the crucial issue of economics. Contemporary families are increasingly led by two working parents who find it logistically and financially difficult to raise several children. As a result of this and other socio-cultural factors, couples throughout the developed world are having fewer children. The World Health Organization recently revealed that fertility rates throughout Western Europe were insufficient to sustain population growth. Many Jewish couples would like to have large families, but the costs are simply prohibitive. Add to this the formidable costs of intensive Jewish educational programs, and it is no wonder that even among Jewishly-committed couples, many young parents are choosing to have small families. For this reason, if the community is serious about strengthening American Jewry in numbers and in spirit, now is the time to create a universal system of free or low-cost Jewish early childhood education.

*Eli Valley*  
Eli Valley





# The Changing Jewish Population: Identity and Structure

by VIVIAN KLAFF

**Initial results suggest both a decline in the size of the core component of the population and a greater diversity of identification with the Jewish community.**

In 1990, the National Jewish Population Survey revealed, among other things, that American Jews were intermarrying at a rate that was possibly as high as 52 percent. Galvanized by the survey, American Jewish organizations initiated a series of outreach programs that revolved around the catch words “continuity” and “renaissance.” Today, with the publication of the new NJPS, we have an invaluable new tool to measure the level of Jewish identity and affiliation in America.

Initial results suggest both a decline in the size of the core component of the population and a greater diversity of identification with the Jewish community. The American Jewish population has shrunk somewhat from 5.5 million in 1990 even though, during the same period, tens of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union immigrated to the USA. In addi-

tion, the 2000 NJPS revealed that Jewish women approaching the end of their childbearing years currently have an average of 1.8 children, not enough to ensure growth. While no data are yet available for intermarriage, the trend is unlikely to decline sufficiently to reduce concerns about this important factor in declining Jewish populations.

The Jewish community will no doubt be galvanized by the new NJPS to find new ways to stem its demographic erosion. From a socio-demographic perspective I have identified two key issues that will contribute to understanding the areas of concern for Jewish institutions and that will assist in the inevitable and ongoing debate about strategies focused on Jewish identity and continuity.

## ***Defining the Parameters of the Population***

My father was born in a small village in Lithuania. At one seder I asked, “how many did you have around the seder

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**TABLE 1. CURRENT SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIP**

Base: Jewish Households

Worcester	1986	60%	Monmouth	1997	48%	Atlanta	1996	37%
Tidewater	2001	58%	Milwaukee	1996	48%	Miami	1994	37%
Essex-Morris	1998	56%	Toronto	1990	48%	Martin-St. Lucie	1999	36%
St. Louis	1995	56%	Boston	1995	47%	South Palm Beach	1995	36%
Rochester	1999	54%	Westport	2000	46%	Los Angeles	1997	34%
Hartford	2000	53%	Wilmington	1995	46%	Buffalo	1995	34%
Baltimore	1999	52%	Sarasota	2001	45%	Las Vegas	1995	34%
Cleveland	1996	52%	York	1999	45%	Orlando	1993	34%
Detroit	1989	52%	Richmond	1994	45%	SF Bay Area	1986	33%
Dallas	1988	52%	Chicago	1990	44%	Phoenix	1983	33%
Atlantic County	1985	52%	Rhode Island	2002	43%	Tucson	2002	32%
Houston	1986	51%	St. Petersburg	1994	40%	Phoenix	2002	29%
Bergen	2001	50%	New York	1991	39%	Broward	1997	27%
Columbus	2001	50%	Washington, D.C.	1983	39%	South Broward	1990	27%
Palm Springs	1998	49%	West Palm Beach	1999	37%	Seattle	2000	21%
Charlotte	1997	49%	Denver	1997	37%			
Harrisburg	1994	49%	Philadelphia	1997	37%			

**TABLE 2. COUPLES INTERMARRIAGE RATE BY AGE OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD**

Base: Married Couples Under Age 35 in Jewish Households

Tidewater	2001	93%	Palm Springs	1998	53%	Milwaukee	1996	36%
York	1999	74%	Martin-St. Lucie	1999	52%	Rochester	1999	36%
Las Vegas	1995	72%	Atlanta	1996	51%	Monmouth	1997	32%
Richmond	1994	63%	Harrisburg	1994	51%	Philadelphia	1997	30%
West Palm Beach	1999	61%	Westport	2000	50%	South Broward	1990	29%
Denver	1997	60%	St. Petersburg	1994	47%	South Palm Beach	1995	29%
Orlando	1993	58%	Tucson	2002	44%	Bergen	2001	25%
Broward	1997	57%	Charlotte	1997	43%	Miami	1994	18%
Sarasota	2001	56%	Hartford	2000	43%	Atlantic County	1985	15%
Wilmington	1995	54%	Rhode Island	2002	40%			

For a full list of communities and results from these studies presented in 124 tables, see Sheskin, Ira M. *How Jewish Communities Differ: Variations in the Findings of Local Jewish Demographic Studies* (2001) (New York: City University of New York, North American Jewish Data Bank). Available from [www.jewishdatabank.com](http://www.jewishdatabank.com).

intermarriage rates. In South Palm Beach, for example, 69 percent of the Jewish population is age 65 and over and the intermarriage rate in this age group is minimal. In Westport, where 31 percent of the population is age 17 and under, the intermarriage rate is 33 percent. But, even looking at the youngest age cohort (couples under age 35), significant variations exist in intermarriage. In places like Miami and Bergen County, NJ, which have institutional structures that attract “serious” younger Jews and where a reasonably high percentage of the population is Jewish (making it easier for young Jews to find and marry other young Jews), the intermarriage rate for couples under age 35 is 18 percent and 25 percent, respectively. Similar rates are 93 percent for Tidewater (Norfolk/Virginia Beach), and 74 percent for York, PA, where the institutional structures are not as strong and the percentages of Jews in these communities are very low.

**Donations to Jewish Charities in the Past Year.** The percentage of households who donated to Jewish charities in the past year varies between 49 percent in Denver, CO, and 83 percent in Atlantic County. Charitable donations to Jewish Federations, synagogues and other Jewish organizations are, along with volunteerism, the “fuel” that allows a Jewish community to function. Thus, this measure not only reflects differing levels of “Jewishness” in different communities, but also affects the ability of communities to serve their religious, cultural, educational and social service needs.

As another example of the differences in the extent to which Jewish continuity is an issue, it is useful to contrast Bergen County, NJ and Tucson, AZ. Fifty percent of Jewish households in Bergen County are synagogue members, compared to 32 percent in Tucson. Twenty-nine percent of adults in Bergen County attend synagogue services once a month

or more, compared to 21 percent in Tucson. Thirty-two percent of households in Bergen County always or usually light Sabbath candles, compared to 17 percent in Tucson. Seventeen percent of married couples in Bergen County are intermarried, compared to 46 percent in Tucson. Seventy-one percent of households in Bergen County donated to Jewish charities in the past year, compared to 56 percent in Tucson. Clearly, issues of Jewish continuity are more critical in Tucson than they are in Bergen County.

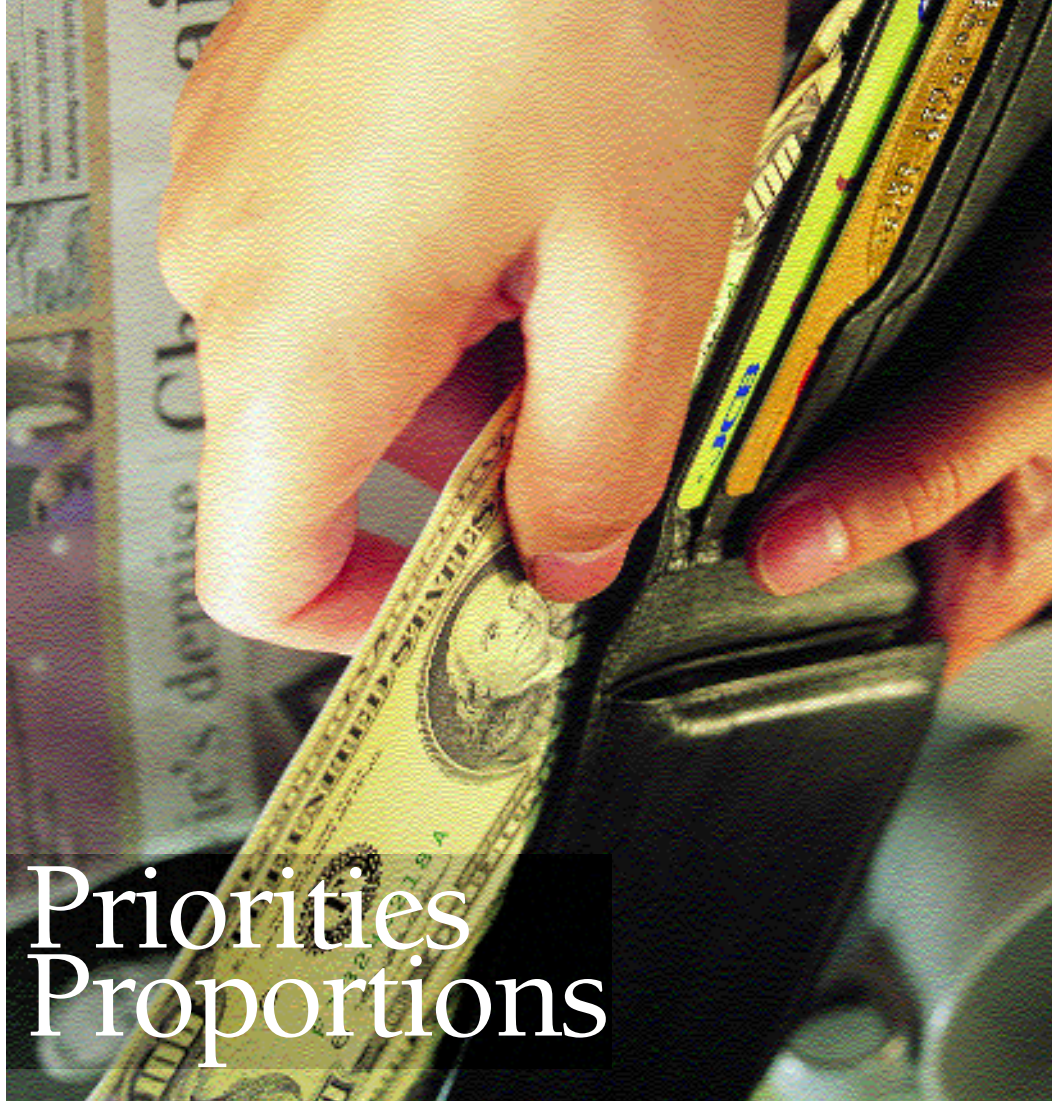
While we do not have the space here to examine demographic differences among communities, suffice it to say that significant differences exist among communities in such factors as age, household structure, household income and length of residence in the local community.

So, what does this mean? First, these results indicate that some communities need more emphasis on Jewish identity-enrichment programs than others. In some places, Jewish Federations and other organizations need to face the issue of reducing funding for social service needs in order to increase funding for Jewish revitalization. A place like Tucson needs to seriously address its emphasis on Jewish continuity and may need to begin diverting money from traditional funding areas to meet its Jewish continuity needs.

Second, these results mean that, in designing programming to renew Jewish commitment and strengthen identity, one size does not fit all. Programming must be designed with differences in demographics in mind. Programs that may be effective in one community may fail in another. In South Florida, increasing synagogue membership means convincing elderly migrants (who have strong Jewish identities) that synagogues need to be a part of their life in their new community. In Tucson, increasing synagogue membership means convincing young couples that being Jewish is beneficial to their lives.

Thus, while national studies provide significant guidance concerning Jewish identity issues and have resulted in important programmatic developments, most programs to increase Jewish involvement will be undertaken by Jewish Federations, synagogues and other local Jewish organizations and must be designed with local community characteristics in mind. 🌸





# Jewish Giving Today: A Matter of and Priorities and Proportions

BY JACK WERTHEIMER

**It is hard to escape the conclusion that money is hemorrhaging from the Jewish community and flowing to causes that do not benefit Jewish life directly.**

**B**y all accounts, American Jews continue to be philanthropically inclined. Although authoritative figures on giving do not exist, the evidence of Jewish generosity is everywhere. The public record, in the form of 990 tax filings, indicates a stunning increase in recent years in the numbers of family foundations established by people with Jewish-sounding names and with some record of giving to Jewish causes. On the mass level, survey research in 1990 found that approximately two-thirds of all American Jews claim to have made a charitable contribution during the previous year. And then there is the intriguing item, in a recent article on American political donations, that some 1.8 million Jews appear on lists of potential donors to political campaigns, a staggering figure for a population numbering some five

and a half million souls. It has been estimated, too, that in the 1990 presidential campaign, over 20 percent of money raised by the Gore-Lieberman campaign came from Jews, and millions more swelled the coffers of Bush-Cheney — all this from a population that constituted no more than 4 percent of voters in the national election.

There is also ample evidence of continued giving to Jewish causes. In 2001, the federations of Jewish philanthropy in the United States raised over \$850 million in their regular campaigns, while simultaneously adding over a billion dollars to their endowment funds and collecting hundreds of millions of dollars in an emergency campaign for Israel. All the while, other Jewish institutions continue to attract significant funding to support capital and operating expenditures for Jewish schools, synagogues, Jewish community centers, summer camps, social welfare agencies, cultural institutions and arts programs, and defense organizations. In addition, American Jewish largess eas-

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## Many Jews are cutting back on their gifts to Jewish causes because they believe that all worthy causes fulfill the obligation of Jewish giving.

ily accounts for a billion dollars a year that flows to Jewish institutions abroad, especially in Israel. In the mid-1990s, some 4.2 to 4.4 billion dollars were raised annually by the American Jewish community, a figure that has grown apace in the past few years.

Although these and other data suggest the continuing “miracle of Jewish giving” (as *Fortune* magazine once put it), a number of worrisome trends have emerged in recent years. One is the precipitous drop in the sheer number of gifts to Jewish causes. The donor base of the federations has plummeted in the past three decades by almost one third, resulting in a net loss of some 300,000 gifts. (Many organizations, including federations of Jewish philanthropy, claim the decline in numbers of gifts reflects a deliberate decision not to invest in raising money from small givers, since too little is raised to warrant such an investment.) Overall, only 51 percent of Jews surveyed in 1990 claimed they had given to any Jewish cause during the previous year.

Moreover, the size of gifts to Jewish causes is quite low. The National Jewish Population Survey of 1990 found that only 11 percent of Jews donated \$1000 or more to Jewish causes annually. A more recent survey conducted in 2001 in the Connecticut Jewish communities of Westport, Weston, Wilton and Norwalk dramatizes the nature of the problem: the median income of Jewish households in these cities came to \$132,000—perhaps higher than in any other Jewish community. Whereas 87 percent claimed to have made a charitable donation that year, only 37 percent gave to the federation—and only 3 percent contributed \$1000 or more. The consequence of such giving patterns has been that Jewish institutions rely ever more on gifts from big givers to make up for the decline in the number and size of smaller gifts.

And what are the trends among big givers? Simply put, big donors direct most of their largess to causes that are not directly connected to the health and vitality of Jewish life. In a 2000 study I undertook in cooperation with the nascent United Jewish Communities, we looked at the 990 tax filings of 232 family foundations that had sufficient means and interest to donate minimally \$200,000 in 1998 to a Jewish cause, thereby eliminating from consideration the many foundations that gave less or nothing to Jewish institutions. Collectively, these foundations gave *nearly two-thirds* of their allocations to non-sectarian causes. In dollar terms, these foundations allocated \$773 million in grants, of which Jewish causes received \$274 million. It is hard to escape the conclusion that money is hemorrhaging from the Jewish community and flowing to causes that do not benefit Jewish life directly.

The reasons for this trend are complex. Some of it has to do with the decline of discrimination against Jews in elite circles: High status institutions, such as museums, symphony orchestras, universities and hospitals that had once kept Jews off their boards or had severely limited their numbers, began to court Jewish philanthropists. In addition, much of the shift concerns a change in the psychology of Jewish giving: many Jews simply do not identify with the Jewish community, a process fueled by spiraling rates of intermarriage and by a drift away from Jewish neighborhoods, friends, ritual observance and identification with both Israel and the Jewish people on the part of successor generations that manage the fortunes of what were once Jewish family foundations. And then there is the growing conviction among many well-to-do donors that needs in the Jewish community pale in comparison with other worthy causes: it is one thing to aid Jews victimized by anti-Semitism or impoverished by misfortune; it is another to support institutions—day schools, summer camps, synagogues, educational and cultural centers—that benefit the middle class individuals who form the preponderant majority of the American Jewish community.

Finally, many Jews are cutting back on their gifts to Jewish causes because they believe that all worthy causes fulfill the obligation of Jewish giving. Jewish teachings have been so stripped of their specific content that many Jews see no difference

between support for universal causes and specifically Jewish ones. All are subsumed under the catch-phrase *Tikkun Olam* (improving the world), and therefore all must be Jewish causes, no matter how distant they are from making a direct impact on the health and vitality of Jewish life.

What is to be done? It is hard to be sanguine about reversing these deeply entrenched habits of thinking, but if we are to convince more Jews to give to Jewish causes, we must embark on an educational program that includes the following messages:

**1** Jewish philanthropy today is not only about giving to the needy, but about supporting a vital Jewish community that can enrich the lives of all Jews, the poor and the rich, the Jewishly well-educated and the Jewishly ignorant. Jewish philanthropy today is about *us* living here in America, not some far-off *them* living in distant lands.

**2** Judaism is not only about being good, but about doing the right thing from the perspective of Jewish values and teachings. Not every cause that means well is a Jewish cause. Jewish teachings have a particular understanding of what is good—and quite a few causes that seem worthy are antithetical to Jewish teachings.

**3** If we truly believe that Jewish values inform our giving, why would we not support those educational institutions that will shape the next generation of Jewish givers? If we feel that Judaism is the wellspring that nurtures Jewish giving, we are obligated to maintain that fountainhead so that there will be Jewish funders in the future.

**4** There is nothing wrong with Jews contributing to the improvement of the world. Indeed, it is perfectly understandable why Jews should seek to play such a role. But it is irresponsible when these same Jews short-change Jewish institutions.

The challenge to Jewish giving today comes down to a matter of balance. When at least two thirds of Jewish philanthropy flows to causes outside of the community—and when important institutions are starved for funds—the proportions and priorities are all wrong. We need to begin reeducating our donors so that they behave as informed Jewish givers. 🌱





# On the Question of Crisis

by MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT

**For the first time in American Jewish history, our population numbers had gone down over the course of a decade**

The news should have set off a Code Orange for Jewish organizations. In October 2002, preliminary data from the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey revealed that, for the first time in American Jewish history, our population numbers had gone down over the course of a decade. In 1990 we were 5.5 million, and in 2000 we were 5.2 million. Some scholars have disputed these numbers, indicating that rather than falling, the population has stagnated. Even if this is the case, it does not explain away the fact that the Jewish community is not growing. All would agree that Jews in America (and throughout the Diaspora) are demographically endangered. In addition to the usual suspects of assimilation and intermarriage, the survey revealed that Jews in America are getting married later and having fewer children — so few that we are experiencing negative population growth. Had it not

been for the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union, and, alas, tens of thousands of Israelis as well, the population drop would have been even more precipitous.

The communal decline is especially pronounced among the vast majority of American Jews who are not Orthodox. There exists a keen relationship between religiosity and strong demographics among Jews. Simply put, Orthodox Jews have much larger families than the rest of us. Although they are a minority, the Orthodox inflate the general population statistics for American Jewry. When we remove the Orthodox from the statistical equation, the picture becomes that much bleaker for those American Jews who are most at risk.

In the wake of the study, one would have hoped to find a leadership galvanized to change. The NJPS, after all, revealed palpable evidence of a crisis. But the community largely ignored the bad news, justifying its complacency by disputing the study's methodology. The community's

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*Michael H. Steinhardt is Chairman of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation.*



total, they too are insufficient to change the picture.

In this pluralistic age, there exist many experiments in Jewish life, but very few if any have sustained long-lasting appeal. In the area of outreach and engagement of young adults, Jewish Life Network created a groundbreaking model in Makor. Opened in 1999, Makor achieved unprecedented success in reaching unaffiliated Jews in

I would also propose a program by which every young family receives a gift from the community at the time of childbirth. The gift could be a down payment, for instance, on a future educational trip to Israel.

The community's narrowminded focus is evident in the area of philanthropy as well. Time and again, Jewish institutions return to the usual suspects for funding. When it comes to cultivating non-traditional philanthropic sources, the community's efforts add up to a resounding failure. Although Jewish teaching stresses the crucial importance of tzedakkah, each passing generation gives a greater proportion of its charity to non-sectarian causes. One cannot argue that we lack the funds, for the American Jewish community is the wealthiest in the history of our people. What we lack is the sense of priority. Jews are major donors to universities, museums, orchestras and hospitals, but when it

leadership focused instead on the bogeyman of European anti-Semitism — a sure-fire way to increase contributions, but an ineffective strategy to stem the demographic and cultural decay.

One possible reason for its complacency is that the Jewish organizational world has stopped viewing the vast majority of American Jews as its constituency. One often hears the rationale that we are soon to become a smaller but more intensely Jewish community. That may be true, but the premise sugarcoats the central fact that we are declining. The least affiliated are invariably the first to disappear; given that there are few replacements, the result, however ameliorated, is decline. When our communal outreach, mostly Orthodox-sponsored, “reaches out,” it mostly doesn't connect beyond the observant, near-Orthodox minority. In the freest society in the world, why do Jewish institutions continue to be insular? Our organizations consider their narrow mailing lists and donor pools as the only turf worth fighting for. They do nothing to project an image of contemporary Jewish life to those who are unaffiliated or unengaged. The Mormon Church spends millions of dollars on savvy, polished television ads for the New York media market. The Jewish community, by contrast, does not present itself to the more than 90 percent of American Jews who do not read Jewish publications and are largely cut off from what's going on Jewishly. Non-Orthodox synagogue affiliation rates probably reflect no more than a quarter of non-Orthodox Jewry, and although many individual synagogues are “points of light,” in

## Our community is shrinking, and it will continue to do so unless we rethink our strategies of engagement and philanthropic leadership.

their 20s and 30s. By integrating cultural, educational and social programming and by targeting young adults, the center distinguished itself from typical Jewish programming. However, it is expensive, sophisticated and risky. Thus far, no other community in the country has shown the will — let alone the commitment and money — that would be necessary to replicate this model.

In the area of day schools, too, we must embrace a broader strategy of outreach. Currently, the community targets families who are already involved in synagogue and community life, without paying heed to the hundreds of thousands of families who exist outside the community's radar. The vast majority of day schools remain acutely religious in orientation, whereas the vast majority of American Jews are decidedly secular. Why are we not building a network of secular day schools to reach out to this untapped constituency? The community is projecting the message that only those Jews who are actively involved are worth educating.

In order to draw in the untapped constituency, we must spread our net wide, and we must start as early in the life cycle as possible. The Jewish organizational world can create meaningful connections for the families of 75,000 Jewish infants born in North America each year with a comprehensive system of quality preschool centers.

comes to the vitality of our own people, we fall short. Today, only 20 percent of our giving goes to Jewish causes. In the middle of the 20th century, the figure stood at about 50 percent. Even those who give to Jewish causes give smaller amounts to Jewish charity than to secular causes. The Chronicle of Philanthropy recently announced the largest individual philanthropic gifts of 2002. The gifts ranged from \$100 million to \$375 million. Of the ten philanthropists, six were Jewish. Not a single one gave anything meaningful to a Jewish cause. Meanwhile, without a major infusion of younger funders, the community of Jewish philanthropists has become increasingly geriatric. Let it be clear: We will not change the direction of the community unless there is a meaningful rise in funding directed at the Jewish world.

The 2000 NJPS revealed that the Jewish people are at a critical juncture. Our community is shrinking, and it will continue to do so unless we rethink our strategies of engagement and philanthropic leadership. It is time to implement a vision of American Jewish renaissance that engages the majority of secular, unaffiliated American Jews who are currently ignored by Jewish institutions. There is no time to waste. Based on our actions today, future population studies will reveal a community in continuing disarray — or in the midst of renaissance. 🌸





To thrive, American Jewry must create an infrastructure — at Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, we call it the infrastructure of freedom — that can nurture American Jewish souls and win the commitment of the next generation.

# Philanthropists to Match My Mountains

by RABBI YITZ GREENBERG

In the 1950's, when I was studying to be an American historian, I read a book, *Men to Match My Mountains*, by Irving Stone. Stone's thesis was that the American character was shaped decisively by the fact that the United States was a nation with unprecedented opportunities and undeveloped land everywhere. The wide-open country crystallized a new personality type: the aggressive, searching high-achiever who would not allow himself to be held back by status-quo thinking or social stratification. When hemmed in by entrenched interest, or checked by the play-it-safe community, the American settler would move on in order to push forward. Over time, this nation attracted the adventurous immigrants and the restless pioneers who overcame the obstacles, climbed the mountains, cut the forests, fought the health and safety risks and created a dynamic, affluent and free society. Thus, America developed men to match its mountains. (Women also, but in the Fifties no one mentioned them.)

The American Jewish community faces unprecedented freedom and economic opportunity that dwarfs all past history, and a unique cultural environment of total openness and an exposure to every religion and alternative lifestyle. In the past, Jewish identity and values were sheltered by the fact that communities were isolated from one another, by the wall of anti-Semitism or discrimination, and by financial constraints which limited choices. The protective shelter operated, in somewhat different ways, for every community and religion. Today, all retaining walls are eroding under the challenge of choice, i.e., the access to every lifestyle, career and value system in the world. In their book *One Nation Under God*, Seymour P. Lachman and Barry Kosmin estimate that 25 to 30 percent of Americans switch their religious affiliation denominationally — an extraordinary ratio by any historical measure. Jews, as a minority, are doubly vulnerable to these trends. American Jews are disproportionately affluent, and this further increases their options. Ninety percent of Jewish youth enter higher education, which stimulates a desire for personal expression and intensifies alternative values. The result is an inexorable bleeding away of loyalty and identity. The same openness generates an environment for people to choose Jewishness as well as to bring Jewish identity and commitment into the highest realms of achievement (witness Joe Lieberman in American public life, Steven Spielberg in popular culture, Timberland's Jeff Swartz in business). The critical question is: which choice will individual Jews make?

Unfortunately, America's wide open society has not yet crystallized a new Jewish personality, or even a reconfiguration of the community to meet the challenge. Alarmed by rising intermarriage and assimilation, as documented in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, American Jewry has taken important steps toward a renewal of Jewish

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*Rabbi Yitz Greenberg is President of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation.*



table, and how many were Jews?" He replied indignantly, "they were all Jews. That's all we had in our village — Jews." Needless to say, they all attended a seder. In our home this year, we expect to have about 25 people around the seder table. They will include those who were born Jewish and who profess Judaism as religion; those who were born Jewish, but profess to have no religion; non-Jewish spouses; non-Jewish parents of an intermarried spouse; and children being raised as Jews at various levels of ritual and tradition. This is a small sampling of the possible identity permutations. It is no longer my father's Jewish population.

With this in mind, the first issue that faces organizational policy makers is "who falls within the scope of our definition of the community." It is clear that ways of identifying who is a Jew vary widely, as is suggested in the following analysis of the NJPS data:

- There are about 3.5 million adults who can be classified as Jewish by halakhah (i.e., mother was Jewish), but a smaller number who are also "practicing" Jews in terms of religion.
- There are between 5.2 and 5.4 million persons who are either Jews by religion; who define themselves as secular but ethnically Jewish; or who define themselves as both Jewish and a non-competing "other" religion.
- There are close to 7 million people who can be categorized as having some current Jewish identity, as defined above, as well as those with some past connection to being Jewish and who live in homes with Jewishly identified people.

On the assumption that organizations fulfill needs, that resources are limited and that the potential clientele for Jewish organizations has a variety of needs, which of the potential 7 million clients are "your" constituency and how are the critical resources available to the community to be used?

### ***Dynamics of Change Within a Population***

The second issue focuses on the dynamics of change within a population. How does the population size change, and what are the factors contributing to this change? A population such as American Jews can change in two ways.

### ***The Demographic Component***

The first is in the demographic size of the population, as determined by fertility (addition by births), mortality (subtraction by deaths) and migration (the net result of immigrants minus emigrants). The 2000 NJPS points to a birth rate among Jewish women that is considerably below the rate required to replace a population. For example, 52 percent of Jewish women aged 30-34 have no children, compared to 27 percent of women in the general population, and on average Jewish women in the total childbearing age group are having less than 2 children each. It is unlikely that social policy will lead to an increase in birth rates, but it is important to understand that the pattern and level of fertility in a society such as the United States is dependent on an interactive combination of factors. These include contraceptive use, marital status, age at marriage, level of education and women's participation in the labor force — each of which indicates a trend toward lowered fertility among Jewish women.

Jewish mortality tends to be fairly similar to the general population. The key differences are attributable to higher levels of elderly in the Jewish population and a higher level of socio-economic status leading to greater access to medical facilities. For example, the median age of the Jewish population is currently about 41 years, as compared to 35 years for the total United States white population.

The third segment of the demographic equation is migration. During the last two decades, relatively large numbers of Jews from the former Soviet Union immigrated to the United States, reaching an estimated peak of 46,000 in 1992 and then declining to about 16,000 in 1997. It is not unreasonable to predict that with some exceptions, the Jewish net migration on an annual basis may fall below 10,000 in the near future. In sum, while researchers will argue with levels and rates, there is clear evidence that as a result of these changes, the demographic momentum is in the direction of a declining Jewish population.

### ***The Social Mobility Component***

The second component is the process of social mobility into or out of a population sub-group. Social mobility variables may be defined as the behaviors and

attitudes that individuals manifest and the exposure to environmental or organizational conditions that tend to weaken or strengthen a person's desire to remain connected to the group. The factor that has particularly disturbed the community in recent years has been the increasing rate of intermarriage. In 1990, the intermarriage rate was estimated somewhere between 45 percent and 52 percent, depending on assumptions made about the definition of who is a Jew. Even if social action campaigns have had some success, this rate is not likely to have been greatly reduced by the year 2000. Other variables contributing to potential dynamics of Jewish connection are internal migration — movement out of the Northeast to areas in the South and West; denominational switching; the changing role of the family, as secular institutions take over many of the socialization roles of the family; the developments in organized Jewish education such as day schools and camps; attitudes toward Israel, in which religious and political views impact on trans-national identity; methods of communication, including the use of the internet and other media; and a move among younger Jews to become part of the increasing diversity of American society. Each of these factors can have a positive or negative impact on Jewish identification.

### ***Conclusion***


The Jewish community is undergoing a dynamic process of examination of its place in the social mosaic that is emerging in 21st century America. According to the historian Lloyd Gartner, "The possibilities of Judaism and Jewish life in America under the regime of free option, state aloofness, and automatic emancipation were to be explored by every generation of Jews who came to America." How will Jewish institutions react to the needs of the current heterogeneous mosaic of Jewish identities? Determining demographic conditions is difficult but manageable. Determining social mobility conditions is extremely complex and may not be quantifiable. Nonetheless, the examination of demographic and social mobility characteristics of the Jewish population are important in our efforts to evaluate and implement strategies of increasing Jewish identity and commitment in the United States. 🌱



These results mean that, in designing programming to renew Jewish commitment and strengthen identity, one size does not fit all.

# Jewish Demographics on the Local Level

by IRA M. SHESKIN



The 1990 and 2000 National Jewish Population Surveys have garnered significant attention among those who provide guidance concerning the condition of the American Jewish community *nationally*. The 1990 NJPS moved the issue of Jewish continuity to the forefront of the communal agenda, resulting in such programs as birthright israel and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE). Both studies contain invaluable information that provide clues to the types of programming that might make being Jewish a more compelling choice in a country where everyone is a Jew-by-Choice.

Yet, another source of data is available for examining issues related to Jewish continuity *locally*. Since 1983, more than 50 scientific local Jewish community studies have been completed. These studies were sponsored by local Jewish Federations and, collectively, provide information on more than 85 percent of the American Jewish community. Because of methodological differences between national and local studies, local studies tend to paint a somewhat more positive picture of American Jewry than do certain national studies. But even that “more positive picture” does not portend well

for those concerned about the future of American Jews.

It becomes clear from an examination of these local data that significant differences exist from community to community in the extent to which Jewish continuity is an issue. To illustrate these differences, three critical issues are examined: synagogue membership, intermarriage and donations to Jewish charities.

**Synagogue Membership.** Synagogue membership ranges between 21 percent of households in Seattle, WA and 60 percent of households in Worcester, MA. Many communities with low membership rates are retirement communities, particularly those in Florida, and western communities. Many communities with high membership rates are located in the Northeast and have a high percentage of households who were born in the local area. Thus, the migratory nature of American Jews results in migrants breaking their institutional ties in the community in which they were raised and not re-establishing ties in their new community.

**Intermarriage.** The percentage of married couples who are intermarried ranges from 3 percent in South Palm Beach to 55 percent in Seattle. Much of the variation in the intermarriage rate by community can be explained by age variations among communities. The Florida retirement communities have the lowest

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**Here is the call of the hour.  
We need philanthropists to match —  
and master — the mountains of  
freedom and assimilation, of acceptance  
and exposure to alternatives.**

life, especially through increased education, both formal and informal. Individual philanthropists have given important contributions to strengthen institutions. The danger grows in that individual projects will flourish, but the dynamics of the new situation of American Jewry will be missed. The successes of individual institutions and experiences are often undone by the relentless impact of media and societal opportunities. To thrive, American Jewry must create an infrastructure — at Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, we call it the infrastructure of freedom — that can nurture American Jewish souls and win the commitment of the next generation.

This infrastructure is the central mechanism needed to raise a whole generation of Jews to choose Judaism and Jewishness voluntarily. We must create an all-encompassing fabric of Jewish life in which individuals undergo a series of life experiences and learning as they grow up — so as to internalize Jewish values and memories and exercise them in all of their life's work and choices.

Building an infrastructure of freedom would assure that from childhood on, the individual would grow up in a framework of vital Jewish experiences and learning. The infrastructure must incorporate a total environment (so the Jewish messages come from every direction and at an optimum level); a vital community (so the individual feels part of something larger than him/herself); intense, preferably joyous experiences (which evoke loyalty and commitment); persuasive, credible learning; and powerful role models (so the individual identifies with Jews past, present and future, and learns how to apply Jewishness to all aspects of life). The institutions that communicate these experiences have repeatedly been identified. They are day schools (starting with preschool nursery), youth movements (especially for the teenage years of exploration), camps, Israel travel and learning (for the formative high school and college years), and adult intensive retreat/learning experiences. Ideally, synagogues should also serve as communities and total environments, a source of vital learning experiences. Unfortunately, too few do so now, but this outcome is the goal of projects like STAR and Synagogue 2000. In

the interim, most vital synagogues use retreats to generate such effects.

Individual institutions cannot create the needed effect alone. We must provide all these institutions in local communities together with a comprehensive funding/access program so that there can be universal participation. High tuition deters day school enrollment, so there must be community-wide funding to enable broader access. Small budgets and skimpy institutional support weaken youth movements. Camps need comprehensive help with capital building campaigns and counselor recruitment programs. Not until the entire network is in place will the next generation be so saturated with experiences and understanding that it will overwhelmingly choose to live a Jewish life, in and out of the community.

To create a national infrastructure of freedom, we need a cohort of leaders willing to think holistically — to expand each institution to be universally available, and to generate the funding to fill in the necessary pieces in each community's mosaic. We need a new generation of philanthropists willing to plan for the overall community's well-being. The key shift is for philanthropists to stop thinking narrowly by focusing only on specific projects. A leadership cohort must emerge that is willing to take responsibility for the outcome of this generation's response to the challenge of freedom and choice. Such a group would map the lacunae in the community's safety net, then put up its own resources and recruit others to fill the void. People say that we cannot afford a community cap on day school tuition, or a universal ticket to birthright israel, so we must content ourselves with individual outstanding institutions operating in a communal framework that is declining. But, in the long term, only a comprehensive community can compete successfully for loyalty in the open society. This is the wealthiest Jewish community of all time. The resources needed to fund the new infrastructures are here, but they must be aggressively solicited at a much higher level. The status quo spells a continual bleeding away of identity, in which successive generations give less and less to Jewish causes. This further weakens the community.

Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Founda-

tion has drawn much attention as a sponsor of successful new renaissance programs (Hillel and the Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps, birthright israel), of educational enrichment (Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education) and of new forms of outreach (Makor). But JLN's true vision — and seriousness — has been widely missed. JLN is challenging the community to create an infrastructure of freedom. Mega-givers must push the community to stop preserving the status quo (in which Jewry is declining) and to prioritize the comprehensive institutional framework that can sustain Jewish life. Philanthropic leaders can move up the timetable and redirect priorities. In the end, after successes prove the point, the community must take over, out of recognition that the total infrastructure must become the standard in American Jewish life. When that time comes, the Federations will treat a program such as birthright israel as the breakthrough which it is, and will not consider it to be a "hassle" when such a program demands greater financial effort than the status quo has allowed.

Here is the call of the hour. We need philanthropists to match — and master — the mountains of freedom and assimilation, of acceptance and exposure to alternatives. Freedom and choice constitute the frontier on which the Jewish future will be won or lost. In a free society, private philanthropy supplies the oil which runs the system. Who will recognize that possessing unusual resources brings with it a responsibility for the entire community, and not just for individual good deeds? Which individuals are willing to subordinate the autonomy they earned by wealth, and join a collective team of leaders committed to transforming the Jewish community? Who is ready to step up giving levels sufficiently to enable Judaism to be a vital competitor in the marketplace of free ideas and faiths?

The tasks before us are daunting, expensive, creative, exhilarating and sometimes frustrating, but the reward will be inscription in the book of Jewish history as leaders of historic proportions. To paraphrase Pirkei Avot, theirs (yours) is not the obligation to complete this historic transformation, but you are not exempt from the mission of starting the redemption. Now. 🌸





## Universal Jewish Early Care and Education: A Worthy Solution to our Demographic Woes

by ILENE C. VOGELSTEIN and FRANCINE JACOBS

“The children are our future.” It’s a slogan we hear often in both the Jewish and general community. However, reality belies the sentiment, and has for decades. In 1984, for example, demographer Samuel Preston noted that fertility rates were declining dramatically in the United States while the elderly enjoyed proportional growth (Preston, 1984). According to Preston, this posed a serious problem. He argued that, given the growing scarcity of children, the United States needed each and every one to

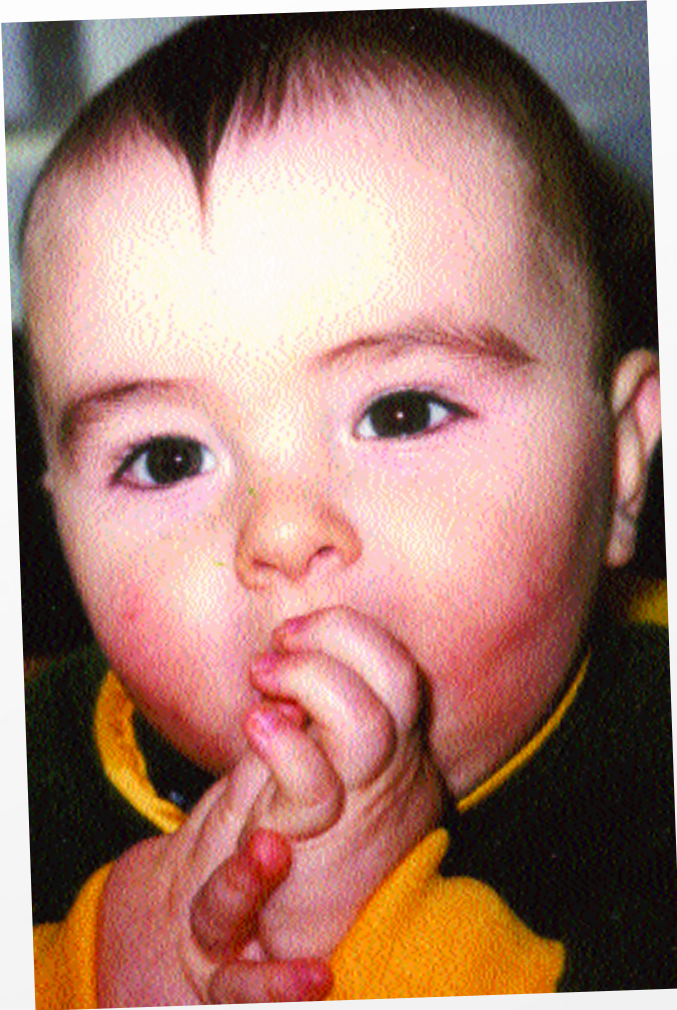
grow into a responsible and productive member of society. He posited that children should be seen as communal resources, not as private responsibilities, and, as such, they warrant serious public investment — which they were not getting at the time. Partly as a result of demographic warnings such as Preston’s, and partly due to the increasing percentage of mothers with young children entering the labor force, local, state and federal governments increased their investments in children. To date, 42 states require districts to offer full- or part-time kindergarten programs and 46 states fund programs for four-year-olds.

Almost twenty years later, the Jewish community finds itself in a similar demographic situation. According to the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey, the fertility rate of American Jewish families is low — lower than that of the

United States as a whole, and below the rate necessary to keep the population stable. This may not seem like a crisis; some argue that we will simply have fewer, more committed Jews. On the other hand, in 20 years we could end up with both fewer Jews and less committed Jews, as well as fewer vibrant Jewish communities and a weaker voice representing Jewish interests in United States and world politics. The recognition of these dangers presents significant opportunities to maintain, enliven and strengthen our community. Capitalizing on these opportunities would require a commitment to a range of interventions in Jewish communal life. However, each new initiative will have to be comprehensive as well as strategic and, to the greatest extent possible, based on data that promise both high utilization and probable effects.

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It is time the Jewish community gave serious consideration to a proposal for universal Jewish early childhood education for every Jewish family, whether it is affiliated or not, disaffected or not, intermarried or not, and well educated Judaically or not. Why universal Jewish early childhood education? There are three broad lines of argument in support of this proposal: research on secular early childhood education that establishes its effectiveness; Jewish identity development theory that supports early, sustained engagement in Jewish life; and the current demographics of work/family life that documents the existence of a ready market for this programming.

### **Research on early childhood education**

Although for decades practitioners and parents have claimed that early childhood education promotes child development, recent research now unequivocally

supports this assertion (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Preschool children profit across developmental domains (e.g., cognition, language, social development, etc.) from high-quality programs. These environments are characterized by warm and supportive teachers/caretakers who offer stimulating and developmentally-appropriate activities and materials. Parents and families can benefit from participation as well, both in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and in the development of mutually supportive communities. The possibility of developing these nurturing, endur-

aspects of early childhood programs might best stimulate it. However, in her provocative 2000 study of Jewish identity development, Bethamie Horowitz found that Jewishness in adulthood appears related to a strong orientation towards Jewish life in childhood. When conveyed in the early years, the message about the importance of being Jewish persists into adulthood. As one would expect, then, to the extent that parents of young children are Jewishly identified, their children appear more likely to be so as adults as well.

### **Demographics of work/family life**

In 2001, almost 60 percent of American mothers with children under age five and 50 percent of mothers of infants one year old or less were in the paid labor force. The average number of hours in a work week has risen as well. The limited supply of quality early childhood care and education programs, particularly for children under age three, is well-documented across the country. Even where they exist, early childhood programs are often prohibitively expensive. Finally, even families in which mothers do not work are increasingly seeking early childhood experiences for their children. The market for these programs is large and growing, and is not being filled by programs in the secular world.

What specific steps might we take? Universal, low-cost or free Jewish care

## **It is time the Jewish community gave serious consideration to a proposal for universal Jewish early childhood education for every Jewish family.**

ing communities of young Jewish families is a particularly appealing aspect of this proposal.

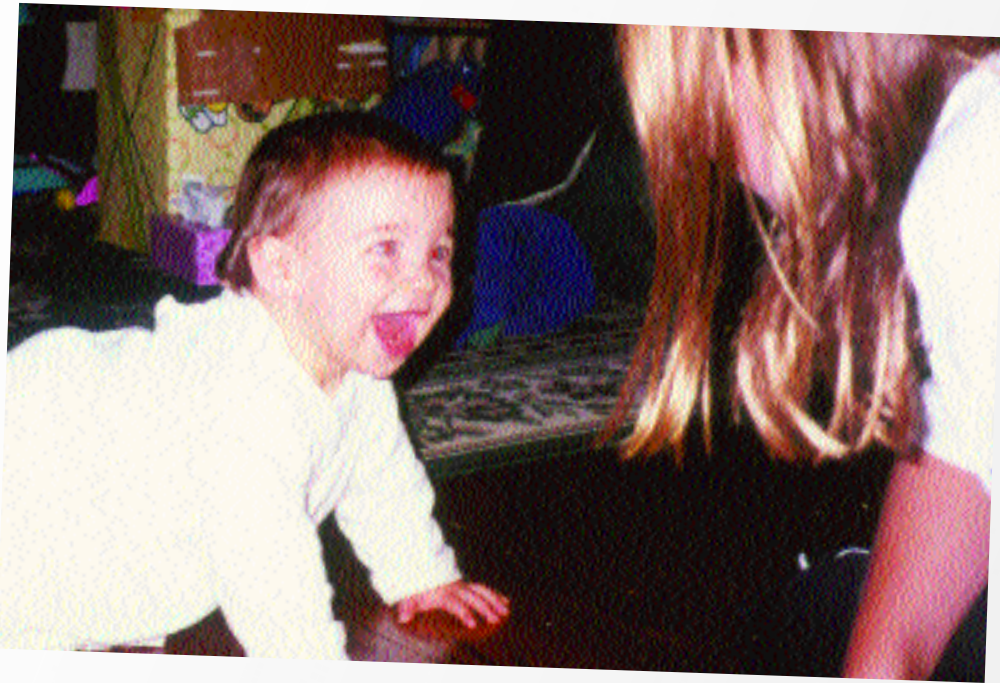
### **Jewish identity development theory**

Early childhood Jewish education is less concerned with stimulating specific developmental skills, or even transmitting discrete bits of knowledge, than with developing a Jewish identity — a sense of affiliation and belonging. There is no research that describes the processes by which Jewish identification develops in young children, or which

and education for children, from birth through kindergarten, sounds like a tall order, but many countries struggling with declining birth rates do it to varying degrees. Below are several ways to structure this service:

- *Provide a sliding fee scale for children six weeks to three years of age.* This service will be particularly crucial for single parent families or two-parent working families with young children. What better way to ensure the next generation than to have very young





children cared for by skilled, Jewish early childhood professionals who will sing Jewish songs as they rock the infants to sleep, play Shimone Omer (Simon Says) in Hebrew, tell Jewish stories during story time and say the blessings over the food at meal time?

- *Provide free programs for four- and five-year-olds.* Vogelstein and Kaplan (2002) noted a general trend of enrollment peaking at four years of age, with fewer children enrolled as they approached kindergarten. According to Beck (2002), 72 percent of children who complete a Jewish preschool experience after the age of four go to public kindergarten. Only 53 percent continue their Jewish education in synagogue-based religious school the year after “graduating” from preschool. As noted earlier, universal public kindergarten for five-year-olds will likely be a reality in most states within the next few years, and many states are currently designing or offering programs for four-year-olds. Although a positive development in secular education, this trend poses a threat to enrollment in Jewish programming, especially since the Jewish content in Jewish preschools is not a powerful draw for parents. Why, then, would Jewish parents pay

for early care and education when they can secure it locally for free?

- *Create community-wide “parents-to-be” programs.* Teach Lamaze and introduce families to the Jewish community and to Judaism. Participants might receive one year of free or reduced fee early childcare and education in a Jewish early childhood program of their choice.

If the idea of universal early care and education is too daunting, there are less radical options available for investing in existing early childhood programs.

- *Make available 1 percent of the United Jewish Communities’ annual allocation to all communities, to be matched in part by 1 percent of each local federa-*

*tion’s annual allocation.*

- *Develop indicators for excellence and an accreditation program to ensure every Jewish early childhood center is high quality.*

- *Integrate more family programming into early childcare and education programs.* According to Beck, “Nearly 70% of families interviewed claimed they were doing something different in terms of their Jewish observance or Jewish lifestyle as a result of their child attending a Jewish preschool.” Developmental milestones can be placed in a Jewish context and celebrated, documented and shared proudly with other fam-

ily members. Let’s create communal and personal celebrations of the life and development of each and every Jewish child from their birth (*b’tzelem elokim*, or in the image of God), to their first words (*berachot*, or blessings), to their first steps (*gemilut chasadim*, or acts of loving kindness).

A large Jewish community recently ran a legacy and endowment advertisement that pictured a three-year-old and a four-year-old sliding down a sliding board with the caption, “Their Jewish future is in *YOUR* hands.” The slogan could not be more accurate, yet virtually no money is earmarked, by that community or by any other, for early childhood Jewish education. A Jewish future requires Jewish children; let’s start early to ensure that future. 🌸

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**The 2000 National Jewish Population Survey revealed that the Jewish people are at a critical juncture. Our community is shrinking, and it will continue to do so unless we rethink our strategies of engagement and philanthropic leadership. It is time to implement a vision of American Jewish renaissance that engages the majority of secular, unaffiliated American Jews who are currently ignored by Jewish institutions. There is no time to waste. Based on our actions today, future population studies will reveal a community in continuing disarray — or in the midst of renaissance.**

**— MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT**